

Yucca Mtn



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Subject: Shipments of Transuranic Radioactive Waste on SR127

I received a call from Barbara Byron at the California Energy Commission yesterday, 11/21/00, regarding shipments planned from the Nevada Test Site to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) in New Mexico. In response to concerns raised by the State of Nevada, WIPP has proposed to make these shipments using State Route 127 from the California-Nevada border to Baker, Interstate 15 from Baker to Nipton Road, and then southeast on Nipton Road to the California-Nevada border.

The radioactive waste in question is not classed as low-level because of the inclusion of radioactive elements higher on the periodic chart than Uranium (primarily Plutonium). However, the material is also not classed as high-level due to the small amounts of radioactive materials included by volume. This material can be routed using the regulations for low-level waste (the material is not route-controlled), but WIPP has agreed to work with the states to set the routing. The casks to be used for these shipments were specifically designed for these shipments, and also meet the Type B standards for casks used to transport high-level radioactive waste.

The materials stored at the Nevada Test Site were originally shipped there from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. Nevada objected to the continued shipment of these materials to the Test Site, and no new materials have been shipped there for many years. The materials currently stored at the Test Site will require approximately 86 truck shipments to complete the move to the disposal site at WIPP. These will be legal weight trucks that will not require permits.

This shipping campaign is scheduled to begin in November, 2001. As WIPP is required by legislation to provide training along the routes used for shipments, they plan to perform a table-top exercise in March, 2001 and a training exercise on SR127 in late April or early May. I am unaware of what additional training may be available for first responders in the area.

The use of SR127 for these shipments sets an additional precedent for the use of this road, following the use of SR127 for low-level waste shipments this winter. Inyo County is concerned that the emergency response capabilities along the roadway will not be able to respond effectively to an incident involving these materials, and the County is concerned that the perceived danger may have an adverse impact on tourism.

We continue to monitor developments concerning SR127 and radioactive waste shipments to determine how these shipments may impact the operation of the highway.